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SOUTH AFRICA

## Out of Luck

### *A KGB caper in Cape Town*

South African Commodore Dieter Gerhardt, 47, seemed the very model of a modern military man. Tall, balding and highly intelligent, with an intense, abrasive manner, the Berlin-born naval officer moved in high South African defense circles and was personally acquainted with Premier P.W. Botha. Gerhardt's home at the Simonstown Naval Base near Cape Town was the envy of his neighbors; it was expensively decorated with Persian rugs and works of art. When visitors asked how he managed to live like an admiral on a commodore's income, Gerhardt had a ready reply: he had received a small inheritance from his German mother, and he played the horses, the lottery and the stock market with remarkable success. Last week Gerhardt's luck ran out. The commodore and his Swiss-born wife Ruth were picked up by South African police and accused of spying for the Soviet Union.

Gerhardt may have first been recruited by the KGB while receiving advanced naval training in Britain two decades ago. He is alleged to have been paid \$250,000 for his information. Because the Simonstown base is located on one of the world's busiest maritime routes, around the Cape of Good Hope, it serves as a vital Western surveillance post. Gerhardt thus had ac-

cess to secrets of international strategic importance. At the very least, as commodore of a dock that refitted and refurbished most of South Africa's fleet, he was in a position to provide Moscow with information about electronic and weapons systems, those of South African manufac-

ture as well as equipment modified from Israeli, French and other Western designs that would be of interest to the Soviets. Naval officials described his arrest as "stunning."



Gerhardt

Gerhardt is the most senior South African official ever accused of working for the KGB. Four other Soviet spies have been prosecuted there since 1967. Though he is described by authorities as a highly skilled operative, Gerhardt was tripped up on a bureaucratic technicality. When South African military personnel travel abroad they are required to fill out a routine form for their superiors. After officials at Simonstown noticed that Gerhardt had neglected to turn in the documents, they placed him under surveillance. Finally police moved in last week to detain the Gerhardts and conduct a meticulous search among the silver and the Persian carpets. If found guilty, Gerhardt could face a firing squad. ■